

Report of the Strategic Director Children's Services to the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel to be held on 7 September 2020

K

Subject:

Children and Young People Living Outside of Bradford City Residential and Fostering Services

Summary statement:

This report highlights the need to address the sufficiency needs across Bradford Children's Services. Our vision remains to offer Bradford children the right to remain living in their home city and that we can create a suitable offer for each child and young person.

Mark Douglas
Strategic Director Children's Services

Report Contact: Mark Trinder
Interim Peripatetic Head of Service
Phone: (01274) 434254
E-mail: mark.trinder@bradford.gov.uk

Portfolio:

Children & Families

Overview & Scrutiny Area:

Children's Services

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report highlights the need to address the sufficiency needs across Bradford Children's Services. Our vision remains to offer Bradford children the right to remain living in their home city and that we can create a suitable offer for each child and young person.
- 1.2 The sufficiency action plan outlines how and when this will be completed. We are working with our partners to enable a better working relationships to achieve the desired outcome for children.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Bradford is a 'young' city and district but until 2018-2019 it had an unusually low rate of children in care in comparison with local authorities of similar size and characteristics. The child in care population has risen steeply since October 2018, outstripping the supply of local authority foster placements. There is no reason to think that this represents a sudden change in the needs of children and it is much more likely to reflect changes in the assessment of risk. These pressures may have reduced the likelihood of children being found an ideal placement. It is also possible that a wider range of preventative services could have prevented the need for some children to enter care.
- 2.2 Our sufficiency research confirmed that, as a general rule, children enter care following a succession of contacts, referrals and escalating interventions. Over each of four years about 20 per cent of child protection plans ended with a child entering care. In the same period 44 per cent of children who entered care had been subject to a child protection plan at least once in the previous few years. We are going to review the progression of children through different types of support and safeguarding, ensuring the early identification of familial and community support that could be drawn on if needed, for example as potential 'friends and family' carers.
- 2.3 This report focusses on the overall sufficiency of placements for our children in care.
- 2.4 Bradford's current child in care population sits at 1,343 and the breakdown of purchased placements is as follows:

Children's home	70
Independent Fostering Agency	164
16+ supported living	72
Total number of externally purchased placements	306

- 2.5 There are a variety of reasons why some CIC are placed outside of local authority residential and fostering provision. This includes high risk of exploitation, risk of harm, increased missing episodes and lack of a suitable internal resource at the time that it was needed.
- 2.6 Bradford Council currently has 8 mainstream children's homes and 3 homes for children with disabilities including respite and short break facilities. We currently

have a total of 48 in-house children's home placements in total.

- 2.7 Bradford mainstream children homes accommodate between 4 and 7 children per home. The national average for residential children homes is 4 children.
- 2.8 Like all authorities Bradford council cares for highly complex and challenging children many of whom have experienced trauma that impacts on their relationships behaviour. Some have experienced previous placement breakdowns. The impact this has on their self-esteem, identity and self-worth is significant.
- 2.9 It is essential to appreciate that not all children can live successfully within the mainstream homes and would also struggle to live within family settings and foster placements.
- 2.10 The Head of Service for CWD chairs a weekly "high cost placement review". This focusses on the total cost of the placement, its value in terms of the impact on outcomes for the child and encourages our education and health colleagues to contribute to the funding of placements when health and education are an integral part of the child's care and placement plan.
- 2.11 The current internal residential provision does not include solo or two-bed homes which are a good option for some young people. We are currently meeting with organisations that are willing to open children homes in Bradford specifically for Bradford children.
- 2.12 To date we have met with two separate independent providers here in Bradford and now finalised our first resource with an independent provider. The provider is now registered and opens on the 4th August 2020. They will care for one of our most complex children.
- 2.13 The aim of this model is to provide a suitable alternative, local option that with directly meet the current needs of Bradford Council's most complex children and allow them the opportunity to safely remain living within their own city.
- 2.14 As part of the continued improvement and investment work taking place across children's services a new and updated children's Sufficiency Strategy was completed in June 2020.
- 2.15 The Director of Children Services wrote that:

"The objective of Bradford's placement and sufficiency strategy is to provide children in care children with the best possible placements.

The Council wants to do what is right for all children in care, which includes being able to provide somewhere safe, caring and suitable for their needs if they are not able to remain at home. This might only be for a few days or it might be for the duration of their childhood, depending on circumstances.

The sufficiency strategy is part of our improvement programme for the whole of Children's Services. There are many changes taking place and planned, which means that the strategy is ambitious but also has to be flexible. For example, we

do not know the full impact of COVID-19 on public services. But the strategy sets out the planning and procedures that we think necessary to guide placement developments over the next three years.

The strategy will allow us to achieve four broad aims:

- increasing our understanding of children's needs*
- developing alternatives to children becoming or remaining in care, through earlier intervention and at 'the edge of care'*
- improving placement and care planning, to minimise the number of disrupted placements and unplanned moves*
- developing the local authority residential care and fostering agency offers, to provide more placements within the district*

The strategy outlines how these aims will be achieved.

The strategy links with many others designed to promote children's health, safety and welfare. Its success will depend on the energy and vision on colleagues working across the Council and in partner agencies. We will work hard to achieve placements for children that are more than sufficient."

- 2.16 Foster care is the mainstay of placement arrangements in England with about three-quarters of our children in care placed in short-term or long-term foster placements. In Bradford in successive recent years there has been a reduction in the placements available with local authority foster carers ('in-house' foster carers) and a doubling in the use of independent fostering agency (IFA) placements. The availability of in-house placements has not kept pace with the growth in demand for placements and the costs of IFA placements are substantially higher than equivalent local authority placements. To achieve sufficiency and to manage resources we need to restore the capacity of the local authority fostering agency.
- 2.17 To date we have started a back to back review of the fostering service including the existing payment scheme which has been revised and is waiting for sign off.
- 2.18 We have reviewed the service's understanding of who is 'suitable' to foster and embedded a much more open approach to understanding the strengths that stem from people's life experiences rather than deeming them unsuitable. Simultaneously we have been running our current social media marketing campaign seeking to dispel myths around who can and cannot foster. We are also revisiting previous enquiries to re-evaluate their current circumstances and determine suitability to be assessed should they still wish to be.
- 2.19 We have created additional assessment capacity within the assessment team through better utilisation of administrative support and student social workers.
- 2.20 We will be seeking to continue with virtual means of marketing and engagement for the purposes of foster carer recruitment post Covid19 with more social media campaigns including moving towards targeted recruitment based on the needs of

the cohort of children in care. This marketing includes advertisement posts, blogs, video interviews of current carers and fostering staff as well as virtual access to the fostering information events.

- 2.21 We are recruiting to permanent posts across the fostering service and we now have no team manager vacancies which is providing stability and consistency to social workers and to fostering families.
- 2.22 We have reviewed the current support offer to our foster carers in Bradford and determined that we needed a more comprehensive, modernised offer in order to attract and retain fostering families. We are close to securing a comprehensive online training package for foster carers to access, which will be implemented alongside personal development plans for each foster carer. We are in the process of creating a series of specialised support groups for our fostering families including but not limited to a group for men who foster and a group for children of fostering families, it is anticipated that these will bring a positive sense of community within our fostering service which is attractive to new applicants as well as supporting existing fostering households.
- 2.23 We are in the process of re-launching the Mockingbird programme in Bradford. This is a nationally recognised good practice model of support for fostering families and children in care. We will be utilising this within our marketing plan in the coming months.
- 2.24 We have implemented an improved complaints system, better communication with our carers and an improved foster carer recruitment process.
- 2.25 Bradford Metropolitan District Council are now official a Fostering Network recognised fostering friendly organisation. We will be undertaking specific marketing and promotion of this from September to December 2020. From January 2021 we will communicating with other local employers in relation to becoming fostering friendly employers and supporting them to achieve and market this status.

3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 For all children, entering care is life-changing and for some it is literally life-saving, giving them protection from serious harm arising from abuse, neglect or exploitation. Nonetheless many care episodes are of very short duration. In the year to 31 March 2020 18.7% of care episodes ended within one month - and at any one time about 12 percent of children in care in Bradford are placed with their parents. These features suggest that other forms of crisis or long-term support might provide an alternative to care for some children, either to prevent them entering care in the first place or to facilitate their step-down. These types of service can also be deployed to help prevent placement breakdown and unplanned moves, both of which increase sufficiency pressure. We will continue the development of our early help offer and 'edge of care' strategy and continually review their impact on improving sufficiency by reducing the demand for placements.
- 3.2 Over half of all care episodes end within a year, most within four months, and most of these in the first month. For children of all ages being in care is either a relatively

brief period or it is one that appears likely to extend until they become eighteen years old. This represents a double challenge in the achievement of sufficiency, requiring a large number of short-term placements, particularly for babies and infants, and placements that will provide for children throughout their childhood and into adult life. We are reviewing the permanence planning processes and timescales and the relative contributions that adoption, long-term fostering and Special Guardianship Orders can make for the latter group. We will develop a new Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy, also including a review of 'Staying Put' arrangements for children in long-term foster care after their eighteenth birthday.

4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL

- 4.1 The Placement and Coordination Service has had a "back to back review" from Local Partnership which highlighted several key operational points for us to consider. There has been a £266K investment over 2 years to stabilise the service in line with key findings.
- 4.2 We are now in the process of strengthening our preventative "Edge of Care" support offer through our Be Positive Pathways (BPP) service. This includes bringing the Intensive Family Support Service (IFS), Family Group Conference Service (FGC) and our existing Therapeutic Social Workers together with BPP to operate as a single "edge of care response" aimed primarily at preventing entry into care. The financial investment for this is £371k over 2 years.
- 4.3 We have reviewed the Special Guardianship Order policy and implemented a significant offer for children and connected people as an alternative to children becoming children in Care. This offer will ensure that foster carers (including connected persons) are not disadvantaged by choosing to pursue permanence outside the care system via Special Guardianship.
- 4.4 We are currently investing in additional resources to review the current 12% of CIC are placed with parents to reassess these cases in order identify when a child's Care Order can safely be discharged, along with better management grip and tracking of this cohort of children.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

- 5.1 The risk management and governance sits within the Children in Care Sufficiency Action Plan.

6. LEGAL APPRAISAL

There are no legal implications.

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

7.1 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY

Not applicable.

7.2 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable.

7.3 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS

Not applicable.

7.4 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable.

7.5 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

Not applicable.

7.6 TRADE UNION

Not applicable.

7.7 WARD IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable.

7.8 AREA COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN IMPLICATIONS (for reports to Area Committees only)

Not applicable.

7.8. IMPLICATIONS FOR CORPORATE PARENTING

Corporate parents will be continually updated on the sufficiency work across Bradford Children's Services.

8. ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESMENT

8.1 Not applicable.

8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

8.1 None.

9. OPTIONS

9.1 The options are built into the sufficiency action plan and will derive from the investment across the provider services. This work is essential as it drives the financial and configuration of resources needed to care for the diversity of Bradford children.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 The Panel is asked to note the contents of this report.

11. APPENDICES

11.1 None.

12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

12.1 None.